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Verizon to cut relay
service for disabled

The phone company will continue
to run it until a new operator is found

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Verizon Hawaii will stop providing telecommunications relay service for hearing- and speech- impaired individuals as soon as a new company can be found to take over the service.

Verizon, which has been providing the service since 1989, notified the state Public Utilities Commission on Feb. 13 that it intends to exit the business. The commission will now have to select another carrier to provide the service.

Telecommunications relay service, which is mandated by the Federal Communications Commission, adds about 17 cents a month to all subscriber phone bills, not just those who receive the service.

It falls under the basic service taxes and surcharges section of Verizon customers' monthly phone bills, company spokeswoman Ann Nishida said.

Hawaii is the only state in the 29 states where Verizon does business where it provides such services. In other states, relay service is provided by companies that specialize in telecommunications services for the disabled, Nishida said.

Nishida said Verizon decided to leave the business in anticipation of further FCC requirements likely to be added to the service.

"There are additional anticipated requirements which we believe will include adding video relay service and Internet relay service which our current equipment cannot accommodate," she said.

About 15 Verizon staff had been providing relay services in Hawaii, Nishida said.

Nishida said she could not say how many people use the relay service in Hawaii.

"The call volume is confidential but it would be given to companies that will be making competitive bids (on the service), she said.

Nishida said Verizon expects to transfer at least some of its relay service employees to other departments within the company. For those not moving to other departments, either retirement or severance packages would be offered, she said.

"We expect to transition some employees to fill vacancies or as a last resort offer retirement or severance as appropriate," she said.

